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ABSTRACT

Many factors influence a child's development of reading skills. Without effective instruction in reading, students fail to realize their potential. Limited English-speaking students and students in rural communities appear to lose the most. Reforms for disadvantaged students must address their needs directly, rather than assume that raising general standards will automatically meet the needs of all students. Skilled reading is constructive, fluent, strategic, motivated, and a lifelong pursuit. While reading disabled children may be unable to read words in a text, the ability to read information presented pictorially and in graphs and diagrams is present. Ability to deal with quantitative relationships and concepts or to think critically is also limited in reading disabled children, with concomitant inability to label experiences, ideas, and objects. Other possible causes of functional illiteracy hindering the reading disabled child include inadequate self-concept, lack of mentation, non-use of the cognitive powers that the student possesses, and lack of attention. Teachers must make certain that tasks are interesting, relevant, and varied, and that the students are motivated to engage in them. Teachers are most effective when they allow more time for reading, proportion work time, closely monitor pupils' efforts to ensure continued engagement, provide for frequent repetition, and drill to overlearning. Educators must find and implement ways to promote broad personal and social development as well as functional literacy skills and knowledge. (Thirty-six footnotes are included.) (MM)

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HOW CAN THE READING DISABLED STUDENT LEARN TO READ AND ENJOY RELEVANT LITERATURE?

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Problem:

Many factors influence a child's development of reading skills, according to the 1985 report of the Commission on Reading.[1] Even as far back as 1964, Ausubel found that, unless students are involved in their own learning processes, they are likely to have a lack of language skills, meaning not only a limited vocabulary but also a lack of words that extend to a lack of the very thought processes that lie behind language.[2]

There are tremendous variations in the rate at which a child can learn to read. Bormuth (1971)[3] pointed out that there was no way to decide just how difficult a passage would be for students whose abilities vary. Moreover, the background, interests and aspirations of children affect their performance in ways that are not yet measurable. He maintained that comprehension is both one of the most important and one of the weakest areas of instruction.

Children, who are constantly frustrated in their efforts to learn to read and beseiged with intense feelings of defectiveness often react with hostility and various forms of acting out behavior. When they feel this way, they become even more frightened and anxious, become either more aggressive, more hostile, or more withdrawn. Study after study have documented the low reading, writing, and reasoning abilities of potential and actual drop-outs.

Without effective instruction in reading, students fail to realize their potential. Limited English-speaking students and students in rural communities appear to lose the most. Reforms for disadvantagesd students must address their needs directly, rather than assume that raising general standards will automatically meet the needs of all students. Intervention should respond to the child's distinct and individual needs. Programs must respond to the many social and economic problems that afflict poor and

minority youngsters; drop-out prevention must address the crisis of incompetency that immobilizes many at-risk students.

Strang (1968) discovered that our children aren t significantly below capacity level and they show no evidence of major physical, psychological or neurological interferences.. They are lacking in basic reading skills. Their skill weaknesses require more time, expertise, and individual attention than can be done in the classroom reading program. She estimated the extent of this kind of difficulty at 10% to 25% for the school population.[4] The estimation today is much higher.

Smith and Johnson (1976)[5] disagree as to what the initial recognition vocabulary should include and how to teach it. Educators must find and implement ways to promote broad personal and social development as well as functional literacy skills and knowledge. If individual and cultural factors support learning to read, children learn this skill fairly quickly.[6] For children whose homes do not provide this kind of literacy support, learning to read can be a difficult task. For students who enter school with skills far behind their peers or who fall behind their peers after entering school, higher standards may impose a forbidding barrier rather than create a positive challenge. Without additional strategies, such students are at risk of failing to meet the standards before they have a chance to benefit fully from the opportunities afforded by public education. Before dropping out of school, at-risk students demonstrate low self-esteem and a sense of having lost control of their futures.

Dropping out is one aspect of a broader problem, namely the inefficacy of schooling for a large portion of our young population. Many students are chronic truants. New York City public school reports a daily absence rate of 20%, half of which are chronic truants. In the past twenty years, increased school violence, widespread student apathy, declining test scores are

additional indicators of a loss of vitality in our education system. (Grant & Snyder, 1984)[7]

Schools are not likely to help at-risk students unless they can change fundamental school-student interactions. Simply raising standards without making it possible for disadvantaged students to meet them is more likely to increase the drop-out rate than to improve their education.

Reading and Literacy. Concept formation, language acquisition, comprehension, and word identification impinge one upon the other. The National Longitudinal Survey (NLS) show s that a majority (50.3%) of all drop-outs had basic skills in the bottom 20% of the test score distribution.[8] How much of the problem is language and how much is poverty and other factors effecting the disadvantaged? Nobody knows for certain whether reading ability is the determining factor explaining higher drop-out rates among Hispanics compared with other at-risk populations, but clearly, reading ability is a critical element in achieving success in school. The read ing disabled student is deprived of an essential means for widening his or her interests, satisfying his or her needs for exploring new experiences and, in leisure time, promoting his or her emotional and social adjustment.

What Does Reading Ability Entail?

The skilled reader can comprehend the meaning of a passage. He can recognize that which the author specifically stated in the paragraph; he can compare, describe, define, clarify, recognize relationships; he can recognize forms of exposition and arguement. Every child, including the reading disabled , engages in this type of oral-aural communication every day.

The skilled reader has the ability to predict outcomes, going beyond what is stated. Such prediction provides the child with background needed

to solve problems and to critically evaluate from the content and the context of the passage. He or she can answer such questions as--What will happen because of..... --In case this should happen to us, we must be prepared to....--to act responsibly. The lreading disabled child also uses these powers of prediction in everyday life.

The skilled reader has knowledge of social rules and expectations, ability to pick out missing significant details in familiar situations and in non-verbal social awareness. The skilled reader strengthens verbal concept formation and perceptual ability through gaining information about the world in its verbal and non-verbal arrangment. The reading dissabled child has a fund of named concepts in repertoire, as well.

The skilled reader engages in interpretive comprehension involving the recognition of the many alternatives which the author might have meant although the author did not state them specifically; the skilled reader draws upon background information and experience and value systems, and organizes the culled information to demonstrate relatedness to text which is specifically stated or implied in the selection, justifying evaluation and judgments, and formulating appreciations and values. The reading disabled child, too, recognizes that there can be more than one answer to a given situation.

The skilled reader separates facts from opinions, draws conclusions, predicts outcomes, interprets words and phrases in context. The lreading disabled child does all of these things. The foreign element that is present in the reading situation, and which proves a handicap to the reading disabled child, is that the skilled reader can use these communication skills through the medium of print while the reading disabled child cannot.

The reader extracts meaning from what is read not only on the basis of visual information, the surface structure of the language, but also on the

basis of the deep language structure, knowledge and experience recorded within the brain. Language and sounds read cannot be comprehended unless the reader makes this critical, active contribution. According to Smith (1975) cognition organizes all incoming sensory data into a meaningful pattern.[9]

Perceptual learning can be separated into three stages, the first stage being the feature discovery and the second and third stages dealing with utilization in feature discovery. The perceptual system must become sensitive to those aspects or features of sensory patterns which distinguish one word from another.[10]

The cognitive model of learning perceives the learner as a consumer of information. Logical operations transform the physical aspect of personal experience into rules that reflect propositional logic. Piaget calls this changing or transforming over time interiorization. It consists of two components: classification or categorization of events, as members of a set or category within the scope of the variable, and the procedure applied to each member treated equivalently. Piaget (976)[11] and Bruner (1983)[12] theorized that the child, in building reading ability, goes through consecutive stages of thought development, each of which incorporates the precision of the preceding stage into a more complex and hierarchical integral form of adaptation. According to Piaget, the child must be able to detect perceptual differences, perceive likenesses and differences, remember word forms, and associate symbols with pictures and objects. Rule development, a procedure applied to a variable, governs the behavior which activates the experiences and helps to take the burden off the memory. Changes in the child's cognitive structure, such as developing reading ability and mastery, materialize as a function of specific

identifiable events facilitated through rule development.

Piaget theorized that long-term memory has three dimensions: (1) episodic or personal memory and semantic memory, or the abstraction of rules from personal memory; (2) conceptual data hierarchy and (3) stratification construct which includes producting, retrieving and using of these hierarchies in the organizing framework of schemata.

Knowledge, the active transformation of experiences, arises out of the interaction between stimuli and process; seeing a word and reacting to it. The contribution of the process sorter brings a variety of capacities and strategies to the task of making sense out of the stimuli, objects, and events of the world which impact on consciousness.

Metamemory develops through something analagous to reflective, abstractive processes. In this process the person abstracts and permanently incorporates into cognitive structure general observations or regularities concerning the properties of one's own action on the environment as contrasted with knowledge about the environment itself devised from visible abstraction.[13]

Introducing the skill of word decoding is only half the process. After the decoding skills have been introduced, the word must be practiced in meaningful contexts until the word becomes part of the learned repertoire and supports the reading act. Poor memory can prevent mastering of the word to an automatic level. A reader lacking fluency, that is, the ability to recall words instantaneously, will be stuck at a level of attending to the mechanics of reading and further comprehension training is unlikely to have any value.

The importance of minimizing incorrect responses has been stressed in behavioral literature. A different tack in training early perceptual skills

necessary for reading involve those of extended discrimination practice. To prevent or solve word recognition problems by the reading disabled child, proper conceptualization is essential.

Attention, the activation added to a structure which facilitates processing information to that structure, and attitude, a judgment of a person on an object or concept along an evaluative dimension, enter the process of developing cognition. Harris (1977) held that comprehension of language was often acquired through a set of procedures closely tied to the structures and content of the linguistic data.[14]

Although, at first, the lreading disabled child might be unable to read words in the text, the ability to read information presented pictorially and in graphs and diagrams is present. Reading is the process of [illegible] meaning through the dynamic interacton of the [illegible] content of the reading situation.[15] Wixson and [illegible] a "means to an end, rather than an end unto [illegible]

Constraints on reading instruction

Skilled reading, the Commission on Reading explained, is "constructive, fluent, strategic, motivated, and a lifelong pursuit." Included in the basic reading proficiencies of a skilled reader are the ability to read aloud unfamiliar but grade-appropriate materials with acceptable fluency, write satisfactory summaries of unfamiliar selections from grade-appropriate social studies and science textbooks; explain the plots and motives of characters in unfamiliar grade-appropriate selections; read extensively from books, magazines, and newspapers during leisure time.[17] Doehring (1968) found in his study of 39 disabled readers that deficiency in sequential processing abilities, both visual and [illegible] associated with reading disability.[18] Still, the [illegible]

faced with the fact that 220 words in the Dolch basic sight word list , which must be memorized, represent approximately 60% of words in primary grade materials.[19] Before he can even hope to do any meaningful reading on a higher level, the child must master a long list of words on the primary level. The disabled reader exhibits low learning efficiency and achieves a verbal I.Q. score that tends to be significantly below the performance I.Q. Poor memory for sequencing is evident with thinking on a concrete rather than on an abstract level and difficulty remembering what is read. Recognition and speaking vocabulary is small for age and achievement on overall reading score is substantially below grade level.[20]

Word identification refers to the ability to develop a visual memory of

sight. This requires a certain amount of sophistication not possesed by the poor reader.

In the act of reading, the student is required to locate or identify explicitly statements in the reading selection itself or in exercises that use explicit content of the reading selections. Needless to say, as words increase in length or decrease in frequency, they become more difficult. The memory load that is created by having to learn hundreds of new and ever less discriminable words quickly becomes excessive.

The basic level of abstraction can be formalized in terms of cue

significance of cues in learning is that cues help emphasize important stimuli. Traditionally, the teacher must discover when to use proper cues and how much guidance to give the learner. The extent of modifiability and amount of teaching investment necessary to bring about the change is assessed in part by measuring the student s capacity first to grasp and then to apply the skills to a variety of tasks in the field of literacy progressively less distinct from the ones on which the principles were taught, and by measuring the amount of explanation and training investment required in order to produce the desired result. Ability to deal with quantitative relationships and concepts or to think critically is limited in the reading disabled child with concomitant inability to label experiences, ideas and

lack of attention. Attitude accompanying features are distractibility and impulsivity. There is high variability of rate of identificaton of reading cues from child to child because of high variability in number of questions required and speed of identification.[23]

Here is where the word recognition process suffers from many interferences used in traditional pedagogy. The teacher must make certain that the tasks are interesting, relevant, and varied and that the students are motivated to engage in them. Teachers are most effective when they

1975[25]).

The average child initially learned to identfy words through the abstraction of a variety of word-identification strategies: configuration cues, morphemic cues, phonic cues, spelling cues, picture cues, semantic and syntactic cues, and the use of the dictionary. In some schools of thought, reading has been conceptualized as the mastery of small, separate, enabling skills resulting in a marked tendency to operationalize skilled reading as the aggregation, rather than an integration of these skills.[26]

A little reflection on our part witnesses to the fact that these word-identification strategies do not lend themselves to building an

cues, morphemic cues, phonic cues, spelling cues, picture cues, semantic and syntactic cues, it can be seen that none provide the single stimulus on whcih the word decoding habit can rest, because these cues are not found constant in every word. Configuration cues change from word to word, morphemic cues differ in every word; each word has its own phonic makeup; each word has its own spelling; picture cues are applicable to only a relatively few words; semantic cues cannot be utilized until the word is decoded; syntactic cues present many exceptions to the general syntactic rule. Hoeweger, every word contains syllables and vowels also are found in

an over-emphasis on skills unbalances the reading program, resulting in an extraordinary amount of time devoted to workbooks and skill sheet exercises, and led attention away from the integrated act of reading.[27]

Reed (1985) contends that if the reader cannot recognize a word as a whole word, then the reader must organize a set of sub-abilities at the next lowest level, such as phoneme-grapheme correspondences and blending abilities to sound out and then synthesize the word. He argues that phonics, carefully taught, facilitates reading, making the students independent readers so much sooner.[28]

What Learning Theories Say About Word Analysis and Reading

The study of reading failure has a long history. It is extremely difficult to establish clear-cut cause and effect correlations between a cluster of factors which may at times constitute a syndrome that leads to a better diagnosis and clearer remediation. It is generally accepted that learning to read is a continuous, cumulative process and no reading skill is ever wholly learned at one time, but continues to be refined through successive stages of nurturing. Goodman (1978) added that reading need not follow oral development, but may be parrallel to it and contribute to the general language store.[29]

Sylvester & Kurst (1943) investigated the sociodynamic aspects of reading problems and found them to be anxiety caused by reading failure and inadequate capacity for mastery. The disturbances in reading performance were found to be disturbances of the exploratory functions and symptomatic treatment by pedagogical methods was determined not to be enough.[30]

Motivational Frustrations

Reading failure gives a sense of inadequacy, threatens self esteem and

term memory, wherein a small amount of information is retained for a short time, is crippled in the condition termed hysteresis, the inability of short term memory coding mechanisms to keep up with the demands placed on them by too much data being presented at one time. The breakdown in the process of short term memory completion adversely affects long-term memory, wherein materials are retrieved much longer after acquisition. The learning disabled reader frequently makes kinetic reversals (mistaking 'b' for 'd'), reads entire words backwards (mistaking 'was' for 'saw'), reverses letters ('flim' for 'film'), confuses sounds (mistaking 'graduate' for 'gratitude'), and has difficulty telling right from left.[31] Penmanship is characterized by poorly formed and irregular cues, untidiness, malalignment, omissions, linkages that are too short or too long, and fusion of letters.[32] Auckerman (1971) found that the child with primary dyslexia fails to learn to read even when provided with apparently appropriate instruction, comes from a culturally educated home, is properly motivated, has adequate sensory equipment, has normal intelligence, and shows no gross neurological defects or brain pathology.[33]

Innovation Needed in Reading Instruction

Educators must find and implement ways to promote broad personal and social development as well as functional literacy skills and knowledge. The Commission on Reading defined reading as the process of constructing meaning from written texts, a complex skill requiring the coordination of a number of inter-related sources of information.[34] In the absence of coordination of the inter-related skills, a lack of involvement and motivation may ensue, which may reflect neuropsychological processing difficulties or problems in emotional health adjustment mechanisms. Motivational problems easily effect ordering and learning by interfering

with attention. They produce anxiety, fear, or fantasizing which occupy the mental processes and interfere with the reading process. The resulting inattention can be subtle, so that the reading comprehension problem may appear to reflect low intelligence, difficulty discriminating, difficulty relating separate sounds, poor blending and difficulty generalizing.[35]

Rather than contributing to the reading act, do not the variety of word-identification strategies: configuration cues, morphemic cues, phonic cues, spelling cues, picture cues, semantic and syntactic cues, confuse the disabled reader's attempts to read? If the student does not know the word, it would seem that there are only two ways he can learn to recognize the word, either as a sight word, or through a decoding process which he can apply uniformally and universally to the unknown word. It is apparent that with the reading disabled child who exhibits low learning proficiency to master a great number of words by sight and the inability to know what words the child is going to need to know for independent reading, to attempt to learn these many words by sight is not a viable alternative. The only other avenue of learning is through a workable decoding system, whereby the child will be enabled to instantly decode an unknown word.

The child who is interested in reading is usually the child for whom reading satisfies the basic needs for self-esteem and esteem of others, curiosity, and the need for success and personal adequacy. These goals can be addressed after the words in the passage of interest to the reader have been decoded.

What Learning Theories Say Concerning the Process Of Reading Instruction.

All learning theories agree that a stimulus can be activated by a cue. A stimulus has properties. These properties, which have a great influence on

the type of process that can be or is carried out by humans. include speed of identification and different systems of information processing. Auditory skills are developed earlier than reading skills and a period of time should be provided for semantic-auditory development. Auditory stimuli include hearing, listening and comprehension. It encompasses auditory acuity, auditory discrimination, auditory learning of auditory sounds and sentences, auditory comprehension and auditory memory. Many disabled readers exhibit tonal confusion, a weakness in their mastery of auditory skills..

Sample Application. Second grade students were being taught oral, visual, and phonic recognition of the letter 'c'. They had already been instructed in syllable recognition, according to the Biggins-Sainz model.[36] Syllable recognition is the constant taught as a continuum thread in the Biggins-Sainz method since syllables are faound in every word and can, therefore, act as a cue for word decodng habit formation.

In the children's workbook was printed a sentence taken from the appealing story of 'The City Mouse and the Country Mouse.'

Once there lived a **c**ity mouse and a **c**ountry mouse.

The teacher brought to the attention of the children the two sounds for 'c' in the sentence, the hard sound '**c**ountry' and the soft sound '**c**ity' and introduced the rule that, when c is in front of 'e' or 'i' 'c' gives its soft sound as in '**c**ity' and when 'c' is in front of any other letter it gives its hard sound as in '**c**ountry.'

The teacher showed the filmstrip of this story. She took the children to the school library with instructions that they were to look in the card catalog listing under 'city' 'country,' 'mouse' or 'mice.' The children were equally divided into task groups for each of the four words. They found a plethora of information and each child, either independently or with the

help of the librarian, teacher, or peer, chose a book. They couldn't read all the words in the book they chose. But this didn't matter to them. They found fascinating pictures, diagrams and ideas and overcame the otherwise-inevitable fear of looking through books that they felt they couldn't 'read.'

A listing of the catalogue entries is given here as a sample of what is available to children when the are not hampered by lack of sight words.

'city': All About Cities; Cities and Capitals of the Central and Southern Andes; Cities and City Life; Cities and Their Streets; City and Town Life; Cities and Towns; Cities and Towns in Art; Cities and Towns, Medieval; City and Town Planning; Cities and Towns Poetry; Cities and Towns, Southern Cities; Juvenile films; City and Town Streets; Cities and Towns, U.S.; Cities and Towns--Views; Cities are People; The Cities of Brazil; Cities of Wax; Cities: Where People Live .

'country': Countiries Throughout the World; The Country Bunny and the Little Gold Shoe; Countries Today; The Country Fair; Country Life; Country Life--New Jersey; Country Life Poetry; Country Noises Book; The Country of the Dwarf; The Country of the Pointed Fire; Country Stores in Early New England.; A Country Wedding.

'mouse;': The Mouse and the Child; The Mouse and the Elf; The Mouse and the Motorcycle; The Mouse Book; Mouse Chorus; Mouse House; A Mouse in My House; Mouse Soup; The Mouse That Fell Off the Rainbow; Mouse Trouble; The Mouse With the Daisy Hat; The Mouse With the Small Guitar; Mouse Woman and the Vanished Princesses; The Mousewife.

'mice;': Mice: Juvenile poetry; mice legends and stories; mice poetry; mice stories, mice and legends

The children were instructed to copy 4 words into their notebooks that had 'c' in them. Some children did copy words like 'child' and

Christmas' where the 'ch' gives a sound different from hard or soft 'c'. The teacher told the children they would study this combination soon, taught through the Biggins-Sainz method as 'New Sound' and 'Silent Consonant.'

Conclusion: There should be no quarrel between advocates of the holistic approach to the teaching of reading and those who hold to the phonics approach. Both procedures should be integrated into a meaningful whole. What is at fault, and must be corrected, is the manner in which the reading disabled child is taught phonics and how the process of developing functional literacy is approached.

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